



Memorandum

September 21, 2007

TO: House Energy and Commerce Committee
Attention: Brandon J. Clark

FROM: Alison Siskin
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Domestic Social Policy Division

SUBJECT: The Usefulness of Social Security Cards for Determining U.S. Citizenship

This memorandum responds to your request for an analysis of whether Social Security cards as they are currently issued can be used as evidence of U.S. citizenship. I hope this information is useful. While the discussion and analysis that follow are tailored to your specific request, portions of the information are taken from CRS products available to all Members of Congress. If you need further information on this or a related topic, please contact me at 7-0260.

Who is eligible for a Social Security number/card?

All U.S. citizens are eligible for Social Security numbers (SSNs). In addition, noncitizens (aliens)¹ who are authorized to work in the United States are eligible for SSNs. Noncitizens who are eligible to work in the United States include those who are admitted to the United States permanently and often referred to as immigrants (e.g., legal permanent residents, asylees, refugees), and those who are admitted temporarily (e.g., H-2A—temporary agricultural workers, H-2B—temporary professional workers, J-1—cultural exchange visitors).²

Social Security cards issued to noncitizens who are residing permanently in the United States are identical to those issued to U.S. citizens. Social Security cards issued to noncitizens who are in the United States temporarily bear the inscription, “VALID FOR

¹ A noncitizen is anyone who is not a citizen or national of the United States. The term is synonymous with alien. Noncitizens may be in the United States legally (e.g., legal permanent residents, foreign students, temporary workers) or illegally (i.e., unauthorized aliens).

² Most nonimmigrant visa categories are defined in §101(a)(15) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). These visa categories are commonly referred to by the letter and numeral that denotes their subsection in §101(a)(15), e.g., B-2 tourists, E-2 treaty investors, F-1 foreign students, H-1B temporary professional workers, J-1 cultural exchange participants, or S-4 terrorist informants.

WORK ONLY WITH DHS AUTHORIZATION.” The Social Security Administration (SSA) also issues SSNs to noncitizens who are not authorized to work if the noncitizen is legally in the United States and needs an SSN to receive state or federal benefits or services. SSNs issued for this purpose bear the legend, “NOT VALID FOR EMPLOYMENT.”³

Importantly, the SSN issued to a noncitizen does not change if the noncitizen adjusts status (e.g., a person who is in the United States temporarily may marry a U.S. citizen, become a legal permanent resident, and then naturalize and become a U.S. citizen). Although the noncitizen is supposed to report any change of status to SSA, this does not always occur. As a result, it is possible that some U.S. citizens have a Social Security card with the inscription, “VALID FOR WORK ONLY WITH DHS AUTHORIZATION.”

Do Social Security Cards Provide Proof of Citizenship?

A Social Security card (or having a valid SSN) does not denote citizenship, and is not useful for determining citizenship status. As discussed above, Social Security cards issued to noncitizens who are residing permanently in the United States are identical to those issued to U.S. citizens. In addition, aliens who are in the United States temporarily are also eligible for valid SSNs.

³ Social Security Administration, *Types of Social Security Cards*, available at [<http://www.ssa.gov/ssnumber/cards.htm>], visited Sep. 21, 2007.